

Talk Title: "Avatar in Education: How Virtual Self-Representations May Influence Real Learning outcomes."

Avatars are self-representations (of identity and/or behavior) within virtual contexts, the medium of self within the mediated environment. Recent research suggests that avatars play an important role in communication processes and outcomes within such environments. For example, people sometimes build alternate-self avatars as a way to engage in social interactions that differ from their everyday experiences. Further, people sometimes unknowingly attribute their avatars' characteristics to themselves and then behave consistently with expectations about those characteristics (the "Proteus Effect"). This research suggests that avatars have a great potential to influence behavior in positive (or negative) ways.

In this talk, I will describe my research on avatars in education. I will present a study on avatar use in collaborative learning context in which I examined the role of psychological connection to avatars in the outcomes of such collaborations. I will also present two studies in which avatar identity in entertainment games influenced education-related outcomes afterward. And finally, I will present a study that I will soon conduct in which students will use avatars as part of their regular class activities, with the expectation that the type of avatar they design will influence their engagement in the course material. Your feedback on this line of research will be greatly welcome.

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